Lifelong Learning

Lifelong Learning Vision Statement

First Nations lifelong learning is a process of nurturing First Nations learners in linguistically and culturally-appropriate holistic learning environments that meet the individual and collective needs of First Nations and ensures that all First Nations learners have the opportunity to achieve their personal aspirations within comprehensive lifelong learning systems.¹

Indigenous ways of knowing and learning are as diverse as our peoples, and each First Nation is unique in its culture, language and worldview. Indigenous teachings provide that every learner is unique in his or her learning capacities, learning styles, and knowledge bases. A First Nations lifelong learning system grounded in the wisdom of Indigenous language and culture will measure its success through the development of caring, respectful, and valued contributors to their communities who live in harmony with their environment and walk with ease and confidence in two worlds.

Key Attributes of First Nations Learning

- Learning is holistic
- Learning is a lifelong process
- Learning is experiential in nature
- Learning is rooted in First Nations languages and cultures
- Learning is spiritually oriented
- Learning is a communal activity involving family, community, and Elders
- Learning is an integration of First Nations and Western knowledge

First Nations peoples understand that learning is a formal and informal, instinctive, and experiential lifelong journey, encompassing early childhood learning, elementary and secondary school, career, vocational and technical training, post-secondary education (PSE) and adult learning. The primary role of holistically balanced First Nations learning systems is to transmit First Nations ancestral languages, traditions, cultures and histories, while at the same time preparing and making accessible to the learner the support and tools that will allow them to achieve their full individual potential in any setting they choose. First Nations assert their right and responsibility to direct and make decisions regarding all matters related to First Nations learning. ³
Indigenous Knowledge and Knowing

Knowledge is not a commodity that can be possessed or controlled by educational institutions, but a living process to be absorbed and experienced to be understood. Learning is viewed as a lifelong responsibility that people assume to understand the world around them and to animate their personal abilities and gifts. Knowledge teaches people how to be responsible to their own lives, develops their sense of relationship to others, and helps model competent and respectful behaviour. Traditions, ceremonies and daily observations are all integral parts of the learning process. They are spirit-connecting processes that enable the gifts, visions, dreams, insights, teachings, and spirits to emerge in each person.iv

First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model

For First Nations people, the purpose of learning is to develop the skills, knowledge, values, and wisdom needed to honour and protect the natural world and ensure the long term sustainability of life. Learning is portrayed as a holistic, lifelong developmental process that contributes to individual and community well-being. This process is both organic and self-regenerative in nature, and integrates various types of relationships and knowledge within the community.v

The First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model uses a stylized graphic of a living tree to depict learning as a cyclical process that occurs throughout the individual’s lifespan. This learning tree identifies the conditions that foster cultural continuity and provide the foundation for individual learning and collective well-being.

The model contains four main components. They depict the dynamics that enable First Nations to experience holistic lifelong learning as a purposeful developmental process. The components include:

- The roots - the sources and domains of knowledge
- The rings – the individual’s learning cycle
- The branches – the individual’s personal development
- The leaves – the community’s well-being

Inherent Aboriginal and Treaty Rights to Education

Provision for, and access to, lifelong learning is an Inherent and Treaty right of all First Nations peoples. Governments must work together to ensure that this lifelong
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journey is built upon experiences that embrace both Indigenous and mainstream western knowledge systems and that First Nations have access to the supports necessary to achieve successful education outcomes at all stages of learning that occur across the life cycle - infancy through to senior years, and in a variety of settings - school, home, community, workplace, and on the land.

This includes governance frameworks, policies, programs and services for all levels of education for First Nations learners at all stages of lifelong learning. Key elements include: language immersion, holistic and culturally relevant curricula, well-trained educators, focused leadership, parental involvement and accountability, and safe and healthy facilities founded on principles that respect First Nations jurisdiction over education. Provincial and territorial education systems must be accountable to First Nations governments, education authorities, parents, and caregivers for the learning outcomes of all First Nations learners attending their institutions. They also have a responsibility to provide quality, culturally-relevant learning opportunities for all First Nations learners enrolled in their learning institutions.

Attachment: First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model, Canadian Council on Learning

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i  FNCFNE
ii  CCL, 2007 p5
iii  FNCFNE Mission
iv  Battiste
v  CCL 2007 p18
vi  FNCFNE